

The Digital Modern: Humanities and New Media

Dr. James Smithies
Digital Humanities
University of Canterbury
Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha
New Zealand
[@jamessmithies](#)

Overview

- Digital Humanities, Humanities.
- High-level introduction.
- Chapter outline.
- Key issues.

Digital Humanities, Humanities

- A community of practice.
- Humanities computing.



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- Introduction: The Digital Modern.
- Chapter One: Computation and Crisis.
- Chapter Two: Systems Analysis and the Problem of Method.
- Chapter Three: Digital Craft, Digital Methods, Digital Outputs, Digital Humanities.
- Chapter Four: The Ethics of Production.
- Conclusion: The Digital Modern, Postfoundationalism, and the Humanities.

Introduction: The Digital Modern.

The introduction describes the ‘digital modern’ and explains how contemporary society and the information age can be – and must be – reconciled with the humanities tradition. It explores the relationship of the humanities to information and communication technologies, and argues that the coming decades will provide enormous opportunities for humanists to re-engage with public discourse. The key is to understand both the engineered nature of the digital world, and its boundaries. In doing so humanists will better understand their role in contemporary culture and society, and reinvigorate the tradition.

Chapter One: Computation and Crisis.

This chapter will outline opportunities and challenges the digital modern presents to humanities scholars, through an exploration of key scholars and concepts. The central argument is that, while concern over the negative effects of ‘computational culture’ is justifiable, a thoroughgoing analysis of the nature of digital technologies suggests deep connections to the humanities tradition itself: these tools are as much a part of our tradition – and therefore our responsibility – as they are to engineers and scientists. Rejection of this fact is deepening the ‘crisis in the humanities’ by alienating scholars from tools that are crucial to their future, and denying technologists and the general public important insights.

Chapter Two: Systems Analysis and the Problem of Method.

This chapter will undertake a systems analysis of the humanities, exploring the global infrastructure, governance, and economics influencing contemporary scholarship. This is not unlike basic introductions to archives and libraries that researchers have received for centuries, explaining the affordances and constraints of the services they use on a daily basis in order to increase their professional awareness. The chapter will then explore the implications the analysis holds for theory and method in the humanities, exploring the way old perspectives can be applied in our new context and how new perspectives are needed to deal with altered circumstances.

Chapter Three: Digital Craft, Digital Methods, Digital Outputs, Digital Humanities.

This chapter will describe the ‘postfoundational’ methods being developed by digital humanists. It will argue that the appearance of these methods is a result of technology that is not yet advanced enough to seamlessly support humanistic scholarship. Although part of a small and emergent field, digital humanists are leading efforts to leverage digital culture for the benefit of the broader tradition; they provide the perfect test case to examine how humanists can best adapt to rapid technological change.

Smithies, James. “Digital Humanities, Postfoundationalism, Postindustrial Culture.” *Digital Humanities Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (2014).

Chapter Four: The Ethics of Production.

This chapter will explore the ethical implications raised by the widespread use of digital tools and infrastructure, arguing that postfoundational methods are intimately connected to contemporary society. Acceptance of ‘digital’ is, and should be, problematic for the humanities community. The nature of computation, its tight relationship to military and corporate culture, and its role in the erosion of hard-won liberties, is deeply challenging. This is not reason to reject it, however, but to understand it and leverage it for the public good.

“we cannot return to a mythic natural harmony by simply ceasing technological development, because we are entwined with the technological development constitutive of our historical situation”.

Hourigan, Daniel Peter. “Žižek and the Ontological Emergence of Technology.”
Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy 5, no. 2
(November 24, 2009).